An Open Letter to the National Committee from ITO Supporters in Solidarity

28 January, 1994

Dear Comrades:

By now it is an open secret that the International Trotskyist Opposition (ITO) is to be an agenda point at your meeting this weekend. As an elected leadership body of Solidarity, we do not deny you the right to discuss our current and its relations to the rest of the organization. However, the way in which this discussion has been arranged can only arouse suspicion on our part that it is yet another attempt to curtail our rights as members of Solidarity, if not a prelude to our being given our pink slips from this outfit altogether. The ongoing attempt of the PC and its supporters on the NC to detour an ITO document from the Solidarity Discussion Bulletin to the yet-to-be-seen FIC Discussion Bulletin and the none-too-gentle suggestions from a leading comrade for us to get going while the going was good in the November discussion bulletin helped get those suspicions burning. The rumors and gossip that have filled the air in recent weeks and which have been our only inkling as to what's afloat can only add fuel to and further fan those fires.

To begin with, this will be a one-sided discussion unless there are any closet ITO supporters to be found on the NC. Unfortunately, it seems that discussion amongst themselves and with themselves is the kind PC members feel most at home with. For up to the last moment, no members of the ITO had even been invited to participate. That would include those of us already in Solidarity as well as those outside of it. Amongst the latter are to be found those desiring to get in, the Trotskyist Faction (TF) from SA (routinely referred to as the "Global Class War Tendency") as well as those seeking to engage in closer collaboration with Solidarity in practical work in the class struggle, the Trotskyist League (TL). Indeed, none of us were ever officially informed that we were to be a subject of discussion. As Marvin Gaye used to say, we heard it through the grapevine.That is, until two days ago.While we did receive a last-minute invitation on Thursday evening to attend these proceedings, it should be obvious to all concerned that this is nothing more than a gesture on the part of our rather reluctant hosts. Who, with the possible exception of Steve Bloom could be expected to put together an adequate presentation on moment's notice, in addition to making all the necessary travel arrangements. Indeed it is probably due to the pressure of comrade Bloom that even this token gesture was made. Comrades would do well to follow Steve's example by dealing with us in the political and comradely manner that he always has, in spite of the often heated polemics that we have engaged in with him, rather than conjuring up these kind of star chamber proceedings.

The cold shoulder accorded the ITO stands in sharp contrast to the way in which the Activists for Independent Socialist Politics (AISP) are being dealt with. Members of the latter organization have had the red carpet rolled out for them whereas ITOers who are members of Solidarity and maybe about to have the rug yanked out from under them are kept in the dark. While members of the AISP may be engaged in common work alongside of Solidarity members in a number of areas, the same can be said of the TL, not to mention those members of the TF, who, for all intents and purposes, are now functioning as members of the Boston branch. TL trade unionists are involved in LPA, Labor Notes and New Directions in the UAW as well as support work around the Staley and Jacobson lock-outs alongside of Solidarity members just as TLers in NYC have worked with Solidarity members in CUNY. Whatever one thinks of the differences that exist between the TL, the TF and the ITO on the one hand and the mainstream of Solidarity on the other, are they any greater than those that exist between Solidarity and the AISP, let alone the unrepentant reformists of the COC, whom the latter seem to have an almost exclusive focus upon? For its part, the AISP apologizes for the ANC's accommodation to apartheid capitalism in South Africa while the COC still supports "lesser-evil" Democrats as routinely as Gus Hall did and does. None of it exactly adds up to furthering the self-organization, let alone the self-emancipation, of the working class, either at home or abroad. Once again it would appear that at the same time a blind eye is turned towards differences that come from the right, those that come from the left merit far closer scrutiny.

There are more ominous clouds in the air than the PC's standing up the ITO for the AISP, however. In the course of a recent branch meeting, a number of comrades, including an NC member, read out the riot act, stating that belonging to the ITO was incompatible with belonging to Solidarity. On what grounds? It seems that our belief in the need for a Leninist party runs afoul of the "Beyond Vanguardism" section of the Solidarity Founding statement. Needless to say the positions of the PC supporting imperialist intervention in the Balkans and of those comrades who advocated a vote for Clinton were a clear violation of Solidarity's Founding Statement, as well as of the most basic socialist principles that any self-styled revolutionary organization bases itself upon. Yet no one is claiming that upholding those ideas is taboo. The same holds true for the contents of the *Left Turn* article urging socialists to abandon their infatuations with state power while the latter is still lock, stock and barrel in the hands of the ruling class and isn't likely to change hands, let alone vanish, if only the exploited and oppressed chose to ignore it. Finally, if local branches are unable to take in new members because the NC fears their being tainted by contact with the ITO, what does that say about all the so-called local initiative and empowerment that Solidarity claims to base itself upon as opposed to the hyper-centralization that characterized all those lilluputian "Leninist" outfits of yesteryear that this group is supposed to stand in sharp contrast to. Seems that the spirit of Jack Barnes is still with us far more than that of Lenin.

Of course, if Leninism and Trotskyism are juridically incompatible with the Solidarity "ethos," than one might as well save money on phone calls or postage stamps and serve eviction notices to all of the ex-FITers who are presently in Solidarity in one fall swoop. None of them have renounced, at least on paper, their commitment to building a vanguard formation. To all of us, our joining of Solidarity was seen as a step towards furthering that process, as unlikely as it now appears to some of us. Insofar as those of us who constituted the Socialist Unity Caucus, in particular, and the FIT majority, in general, were concerned, the right to fight for our particular politics within Solidarity was taken as a given in our becoming members. Whether or not other ex-FITers decide to do so, we intend to continue to make use of our rights as members of this organization to fight to change it in the direction we see fit (no pun intended), and convince as many members as are interested to support us in our efforts. If certain leading members of this organization think we are being "out of line" for our doing so than we challenge them to respond in a political and not a police fashion. They can begin by making a serious attempt to include us in any discussion they choose to have about us as well as voting down any undemocratic measures aimed against us at this meeting.

For the ITO in Solidarity
Roy Rollin